

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AS GROUP INTERACTION:  
THE CASE OF RUSSIA AND NATO

BY  
ANNE E. LABADIE

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## APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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SHAWN T. COCHRAN, Lt COL, PhD

(Date)

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STEPHEN E. WRIGHT, PhD

(Date)



## DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the French Air Force, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maj Anne Labadie is a French Air Force maintenance officer. Commissioned in 1999, Maj Labadie is a graduate of the French Air Force Academy. She served in various maintenance units for the Mirage 2000-5F and Mirage 2000N, and spent three years with the 1/2 Fighter Squadron at Dijon AFB. In 2012, Maj Labadie graduated from the Paris School of International Affairs with a Master's Degree in International Security Studies. She taught for two years at the French Air Force Academy before moving to the United States and graduating from the Air Command and Staff College. She is married.



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## ABSTRACT

Relations between Russia and NATO have deteriorated dramatically since 2008. Unfortunately, traditional explanations emphasizing historical continuities and power politics are insufficient to understand the current dynamics. A sociological approach to international relations, emphasizing intergroup interaction, offers an alternative perspective and can help us better understand recent trends of Russian behavior toward the West.

Theories of group dynamics lay out fundamental concepts regarding intergroup and out-group/in-group relations. They demonstrate that the existence of groups changes the behavior of group members and influences intergroup relations. Most importantly, groups can inadvertently foster discrimination, competition, and even aggression. Applied to the context of international relations, the same concepts explain how security communities can promote discrimination and aggressive behaviors toward non-members. Additionally, scarcity of resources and asymmetry of power can create a hierarchical trust dilemma that leads non-members to exhibit paranoid traits.

In the case of NATO and Russia, it appears that the former has all the attributes of a group discriminating against external countries. Moreover, Russia's relative weakness places the country in an inferior position. The sociological approach predicts that Russia should consequently exhibit a paranoid behavior, which is congruent with many of Russia's recent actions on the international scene.

A sociological approach to international relations can offer a valuable perspective when examining interactions between states and groups of states. This approach is also relevant to the field of group conflict resolution. Applying its findings to interstate conflict might yield new strategies for easing tensions and increasing mutual understanding.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **The Russian Puzzle**

In the summer of 1989, State Department official Francis Fukuyama published “The End of History?”, a controversial article celebrating what he saw as a fundamental shift in the international order. Fukuyama claimed that the termination of the Cold War symbolized a triumph of the West, of Western societies, and of the liberal ideal. The waning of the Marxist-Leninist ideology was supposed to usher in a new era in which large-scale conflict between states would be less likely, and in which economic calculation would replace ideological struggle.

However, Fukuyama also predicted that it was not “terribly likely” that economic and societal reforms would make the Soviet Union a democratic and liberal state “any time in the near future.”<sup>1</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union two years later took the world by surprise, as no one had anticipated that the wave of reforms undertaken by Mikhail Gorbachev would lead to the rapid dissolution of the Communist bloc. Because the antagonism between the Soviet Union and the US-led Western bloc had driven international relations since 1945, these events left many wondering what world politics would look like after 1991.

If caution prevailed for a time, Western leaders soon dismissed the notion that Russia, the Soviet Union’s heir, remained a threat. In 1998, Madeleine Albright, United States Secretary of State, declared that, while the future of Russia remained uncertain, its relations with the West in general, and NATO members in particular, were moving toward greater

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” The National Interest, Summer 1989



understanding and cooperation.<sup>2</sup> In its 2006 National Security Strategy, the United States emphasized its ability to work closely with Russia on pressing issues, to include the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs and market integration. While stressing the need to push further democratization in Russia's neighboring countries, the 2006 National Security Strategy also recognized Russia as one of the key partners of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, optimism prevailed in Europe. With the signature of the Partnership Cooperation Agreement between Russia and the European Union in 1994, European leaders tried to foster engagement with Moscow through several initiatives. The Common Spaces of Cooperation, for example, was supposed to facilitate partnership on issues such as trade, freedom, security, and education.<sup>4</sup>

The tide began to turn, however, with the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008. In 2010, the US National Security Strategy still recognized Russia as a crucial partner with whom a strong relationship would be necessary to advance US interests; but the new strategic document abandoned the idea of an enhanced relationship between NATO and Russia, or the European Union and Russia.<sup>5</sup> Things worsened in 2014, when the conflict between Moscow and Ukraine raised

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<sup>2</sup> Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Statement on NATO Enlargement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 24 February 1998, As released by the Office of the Spokesman U.S. Department of State

<sup>3</sup> The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, March 2006, 38

<sup>4</sup> 97/800/EC, ECSC, Euratom, "Council and Commission Decision of 30 October 1997 on the conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Russian Federation, of the other part," Official Journal L 327, 28/11/1997 P. 0001 – 0002, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:31997D0800>

<sup>5</sup> National Security Strategy, May 2010, <http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf>

the specter of war on the borders of the European Union. US authorities saw Russia's aggression as one of the most serious challenges to American national security. Just as during the heyday of Cold War, NATO became once again the means to deter Russian aggression and to ensure the security of US allies in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

The European Union's policy toward Russia underwent a similar shift. Today, the European Union External Action website states that some of the activities of cooperation with Russia "are at a halt and sanctions have been adopted," following Russian actions in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> According to the European Council on Foreign Relations, a European think-tank, Russia is now defining itself as the "Anti-Europe," with radically opposed values and a distinct worldview.<sup>8</sup>

This worsening relationship is of particular concern to Western leaders given Russia's position as a major international player. With a territory approximately 1.8 times the size of the US, a population of more than 142 million, and a military budget behind that of only US and China, Russia has the means to be a serious troublemaker even without resorting to its nuclear arsenal. Further, Russia's rankings as the world's top producer of crude oil and top exporter of natural gas provide powerful leverage over numerous countries, to include many of Russia's European neighbors.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> National Security Strategy, February 2015, <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> European Union External Action website, [http://eeas.europa.eu/russia/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/russia/index_en.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Josef Janning, "Ruxit is real: Russia's exit from Europe," *European Council On Foreign Relations*, 27 February 2015, [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_ruxit\\_is\\_real\\_russias\\_exit\\_from\\_europe311243](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_ruxit_is_real_russias_exit_from_europe311243)

<sup>9</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

In order to avoid further deterioration of relations with Russia, it is crucial to understand the drivers of Moscow's foreign policy and hostility toward the West. Unfortunately, traditional explanations emphasizing historical continuities and power politics may be insufficient. This thesis examines international politics through the sociological lens of group dynamics and proposes the value of such an approach for assessing state behavior. In particular, it suggests that group theory can help us better understand recent trends of Russian behavior in the international domain, to include Russia's growing belligerence in its dealings with the West and NATO in particular.

### **Problems with Traditional Explanations**

One can classify available explanations for Russia's foreign policy according to two main streams: historical continuity and balance-of-power logic. Among the proponents of historical continuity-type explanations, Kuchins and Zevelev identify five elements of Russia's history that might explain its foreign policy, the most important being the heritage of the Tsarist Empire.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in 2009, the French Institute of International Relations claimed that Alexander Gorchakov, who had restored Russian power and influence after the disastrous Crimean war in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the inspiration behind both Medvedev's and Putin's ideas on foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> In 2015, a report by the RAND Corporation asserted that "Russia's general attitude (...was) largely consistent with historical Russian (and Soviet) thinking about security interests and foreign policy, not only over the past decade but going back

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<sup>10</sup> Igor A. Zevelev, Andrew C. Kuchins, "Russian Foreign Policy: Continuity in Change," *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2012), Center for Strategic and International Studies, 147-148

<sup>11</sup> Aurel Braun, "L'OTAN et la Russie : perceptions des menaces après la Géorgie," *Russie.Nei.Visions* n°40, IFRI, May 2009

some three centuries.”<sup>12</sup> In sum, Russian foreign policy of today is a consequence of a deeply held Russian psyche and of Russia’s history.

For others, Russia’s behavior stems from a desire to challenge the current international order and secure relative power gains. According to Stephen Blank of the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, the main objectives of Russian foreign policy are to disrupt the European balance of power and oppose American influence at any cost, but without any real vision of what an alternative order should look like.<sup>13</sup> Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Charles King shares the same point of view when he interprets Russian actions in Georgia and Ukraine as having “distanced the country from Western institutions,” but above all as an attempt to create a world “in which they do not have to care.”<sup>14</sup> More commonly, however, analysts interpret Moscow’s actions as an attempt to reassert the country’s dominance in its traditional sphere of influence, and to reinstate its status as a regional power. For proponents of these explanations, the actions of Russia are the expression of the realist balance-of-power theory.

These two types of explanation usually blend in the basic assertion that Russia is trying to regain its status, power, and influence the old-fashioned way. There are two major issues with this line of thought. First, it does not take into account the profound changes in the international system since 1991. While the traditional balance-of-power logic continues to hold some purchase, this logic tends to overlook the

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<sup>12</sup> Olikier, Olga, Christopher S. Chivvis, Keith Crane, Olesya Tkacheva and Scott Boston, *Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context: A Reassessment*, Report PE-144-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), 5

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Blank, *Russia’s Approach to National and International Security*, US Army War College, 20 February 2012

<sup>14</sup> Charles King, “The Five-Day War,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2008

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2008-11-01/five-day-war>

specificities of the current situation. In *Analogies at War*, Yuen Foong Khong demonstrates that statesmen often turn to historical analogies as an analytical framework for decision-making. He also establishes how cognitive psychology explains why this type of reasoning misinforms rather than informs: by emphasizing information consistent with the chosen analogy's paradigm, and trying to reduce cognitive dissonance, leaders tend to disregard inconsistent information.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Russia, analogical reasoning might lead to applying the recipes of the Cold War, disregarding the vast differences between Putin's Russia and its place in the world, and the Soviet Union. In addition, as Andrew Monaghan observes, the "simplistic" narrative might prevent Western countries from devising suitable policies to deal with the crisis between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>16</sup>

Second, an explanation limited to the quest for power is likely to induce power-based reactions among other countries. Robert Jervis cautions against the spiral that the combination of mistrust, insecurity, and power-seeking measures might induce, and of which an arms race is "the most obvious manifestation." Because of the anarchic nature of the international environment, and because states "tend to assume the worst," measures taken for one state's self-protection can seem aggressive to other states. Current interactions between Moscow and Western countries exhibit numerous examples of such spiral. In November 2015, for example, NATO held its largest exercise in a decade. Exercise Trident Juncture, with more than 36000 personnel from 30 countries participating, was designed to show "that NATO's capabilities

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<sup>15</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992), 257

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Monaghan and Royal Institute of International Affairs, *A "New Cold War"?: Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia*, 2015, 1, [http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field\\_document/20150522ColdWarRussiaMonaghan.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150522ColdWarRussiaMonaghan.pdf).

are real and ready,” and to deter any potential adversary.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, NATO officials invited Russia to observe “closely” the exercise in the hope that it would demonstrate NATO cohesion and have a “deterrent effect.”<sup>18</sup> However, Sputnik, an international news agency operated by the Russian government, claimed that the exercise was “a cause of major concern for all those alarmed by the bloc's increasing assertiveness and unconstrained military buildup.”<sup>19</sup> Quoting an anti-war organization, Sputnik accused NATO of increasing insecurity, preparing for war, and encouraging fear. Russia has since repeatedly warned against any increase of NATO forces on its border.

However simple and seductive a history-based or power-based explanation might be, such explanations are incomplete and potentially dangerous. Such explanations do not resonate well with the current context of international relations, and might lead to a counterproductive spiral of power seeking and aggression on both sides.

Russia is a major power in today's international game, and it is necessary to find a better explanation for Russia's recent belligerent behavior. A deeper understanding may help Western leaders respond more effectively to Russian actions, and help avoid escalation with a powerful economic and military actor.

### **International Relations as Group Interaction?**

Any explanation for Russian behavior must reconcile the state's actions with the context in which those actions take place. While there

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<sup>17</sup> “Trident Juncture shows NATO capabilities ‘are real and ready,’” [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_124265.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_124265.htm)

<sup>18</sup> Julian E. Barnes, “Russia Gets To Observe NATO's Biggest Exercise In Years,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 July 2015, <http://blogs.wsj.com/brussels/2015/07/15/russia-gets-to-observe-natos-biggest-exercise-in-years/>

<sup>19</sup> “Trident Juncture 2015: What is NATO Training for During Massive War-Games?”, *Sputnik News*, 26 October 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/military/20151026/1029108065/military-drills-nato-russia-sabre-rattling.html>



remains some debate as to the polarity of the international system, there is little doubt that multilateralism prevails: today, states seldom act alone. Instead, they routinely choose to act as part of ad hoc coalitions, in the name of international institutions, or as part of regional organizations. It seems that today, more than ever, states act in groups. Latest examples of this behavior include Western interventions in Iraq, Libya, or Syria, as well as the coalition of African and Western states that intervened in Mali.

This thesis will explain how Russia's behavior fits within this context of group interaction. In order to do so, it will present notions developed about group behavior in the broader field of sociology and will apply these concepts to the dynamics of security alliances. In particular, the thesis will focus on the effects of groups on individual actors who are not part of these groups (out-group versus in-group perspective), and on the interactions among groups (intergroup behavior). The study will try to answer four main questions. First, how can we characterize groups in international relations, with a focus on security alliances? Second, how do these groups interact and influence the overall system? Third, what are the effects of groups on their external environment and on actors external to the group? Finally, and more specifically, can theories of group dynamics give us a better understanding of Russia's behavior?

### **The Value of the Sociological Approach**

The sociological approach to the study of international politics is not a revolutionary one. Several authors have demonstrated the value of sociology in seeking to understand the behavior of states and in defining states' identities. In particular, multiple studies have focused on the existence of collective identities for states being part of a same group. In *Social Theory of International Politics*, Alexander Wendt characterizes collective identity as one of the four different types of state identity. He states that several variables enable the emergence of collective identities among states, one of them being interdependence, the degree to which an

outcome for one given state is dependent on other states' actions, and another one being common fate, the dependence of one state's fate on the fate of the group as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, the importance of alliances, and security alliances in particular, is the focus of numerous studies. Security alliances were a prominent feature of international relations even before the advent of Westphalian-type states. However, alliances have played a particularly significant role since the beginning of the twentieth century, and have assumed a more institutional character. According to Ikenberry, cooperative security, which means states binding themselves together through formal institutions, is "arguably the most important innovation in national security in the twentieth century."<sup>21</sup> Today, military alliances flourish globally. The African Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Common Security, and Defense Policy of the European Union, and the Union of South American Nations are all examples of international organizations that encompass a military dimension.

Scholars have long recognized the impact of security alliances on member states. Few, however, have tried to understand the impact on external states, or on those out-group states excluded from a given security alliance. Seeking to offer a better or at least a more complete explanation for Russian behavior in the international domain, this study focuses on each side of the in-group, out-group divide.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The purpose of this study is not to debate the motivations behind Russia's behavior; and it does not take a position on whether Russia is

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 67 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 344-362

<sup>21</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011), 183



merely seeking power and regional hegemony, as suggested by realist scholars, or is on a crusade to defend its identity and values. Rather, the study assumes the importance of both power and identity, and focuses on the impact of groups in the international system. Moreover, it emphasizes interstate security alliances and leaves aside other types of groups such as international economic organizations. This focus on security is not only due to the need to restrict the study to a manageable length, but also the consequence of the author's belief that security is, and will remain, the primary goal of states and thus the driver of international politics.

### **Roadmap**

The next chapter acquaints the reader with a number of useful notions of social group theories, and builds a framework to understand intergroup and out-group/in-group dynamics. Chapter 3 applies this framework to the international system and, in particular, to the fabric of security alliances that defines today's international environment. Chapter 4 assesses the specific case of Russian behavior by looking at how Russia, as part of the out-group, relates to NATO, which represents the in-group. This case study demonstrates that the pattern of Russia's relationship with NATO is consistent with the expectations of intergroup theory. Finally, the thesis draws conclusions about intergroup theory applied to the study of international relations and suggests how the broader sociological approach might inform efforts to mitigate tensions between Russia and the West.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Sociological Approach to Intergroup Relations**

This chapter addresses some of the fundamental sociological concepts needed to understand intergroup and out-group/in-group relations. It first defines the notion of a group and assesses why and when groups matter. It will then describe the main features of intergroup relations and, more specifically, the relations between a group and those who are not part of the group.

#### **Groups**

##### **Definition**

A common definition for a group is “a number of individuals assembled together or having some unifying relationship.”<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, however, I adopt the sociological definition suggested by Henri Tajfel, who describes a group by analogy with a nation: a group exists whenever there is a body of people who feel like they are part of a group.<sup>2</sup>

There are several components to group membership: the cognitive knowledge that one is part of a group, the evaluative aspect defining the associated value of group membership, and the emotional component encompassing the emotions toward the individual’s own group and its environment (other individuals in relation with this group). Further, criteria for membership can vary and be either internal (decided by the members themselves) or external. With the latter case, criteria can be purely objective, given by an external observer. More often, however, external criteria will be those that outside actors use to designate the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition*, s.v. “group”

<sup>2</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 229

group and that are then internalized by the group's members.<sup>3</sup> The author summarizes these key points in Table 1.

**Table 1: Membership Components**

Membership components	
Cognitive	Awareness of the membership
Evaluative	Value attached to the membership
Emotional	Feelings toward the group and its environment

*Source: Tajfel, Human Groups and Social Categories*

### **Why does group membership matter?**

The weight of group membership is a consequence of individual behaviors being driven by norms, values, and a sense of “appropriateness of conduct.” As Tajfel suggests, individual behavior “is to a very large extent determined by what an individual deems to be appropriate,” and that “his conceptions of what is appropriate are in turn determined by the prevailing system of norms and values.”<sup>4</sup> The work of Sherif on social norms demonstrates the powerful psychological processes that enable groups to build these prevailing systems.<sup>5</sup> By defining and then enforcing frames of reference, and establishing sets of values and of norms upon which members have collectively agreed, groups exert a powerful influence on the behavior of their members.

More precisely, the standardization of norms “regulating relations and activities within the group and with non-members and out-groups” represents the culmination of group creation. The creation process starts with an incentive for individuals to begin interacting; this

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<sup>3</sup> Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 229-232

<sup>4</sup> Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 36

<sup>5</sup> Muzafer Sherif, *The Psychology of Social Norms*, 2. printing (New York, NY: Octagon Books, 1973), 105-107

interaction slowly influences the behavior of these individuals (“differential effects on individual behavior”); if the interaction continues, a group structure begins to form, with “hierarchical status and role relationships.”<sup>6</sup>

Once this structure exists, it creates dividing lines between members of a group, or the “in-groups,” and those on the outside of the group, or the “out-groups.”<sup>7</sup> Such categorization fosters stereotyping. Stereotyping is particularly acute in conditions that require simplification of overly “complex, and usually distressful, large-scale social events,” justification of actions committed against the out-group, or reinforcement of the positive evaluation of one’s group. As cognitive shortcuts, stereotypes can fulfill a number of useful social functions, but they can also be value-laden apart from any rational utility. In such cases, categorization in stereotypes contributes to the building and hardening of a value system. Any actor embedded within this value system is likely to ignore evidence that could disconfirm the associated stereotypes and thus threatens the system.<sup>8</sup>

Tajfel suggests rating behaviors on an interpersonal-intergroup continuum. On one end of the spectrum, behaviors are those of independent individuals. On the other end of the spectrum, group affiliation dictates behaviors. There are two main consequences of group affiliation playing a dominant role. First, differences between members will fade, and member behaviors will display a growing uniformity. Second, differences among members of the out-group will also fade. This means that individuals outside the group will be considered

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<sup>6</sup> Muzafer Sherif, O. J. Harvey, B. Jack White, William R. Hood, and Carolyn W. Sherif, *The Robbers Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (PDF version, 1964), 7

<sup>7</sup> Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn W. Sherif, *Groups in Harmony and Tension: An Integration of Studies on Intergroup Relations*, 2. printing (New York: Octagon books, 1973), 151

<sup>8</sup> Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 143-154, 224-225

“undifferentiated items in a unified social category, i.e. independently of the individual differences between them.”<sup>9</sup>

### **When does group membership matter?**

According to Tajfel, three principles explain the frequency with which an individual will choose intergroup over interpersonal behavior. First, when the three components of group membership (cognitive, evaluative, and emotional) are strongly ingrained, group members are more likely to respond according to their group's norms and identity. Second, some situations force predominance of group membership over individual personality. This is the case, for example, when a group's characteristics define the treatment an individual receives. Race-based segregation or ethnic wars represent situations of this type. These situations, in which members have no other choice but to respond in accordance with group membership, also reinforce group identification.

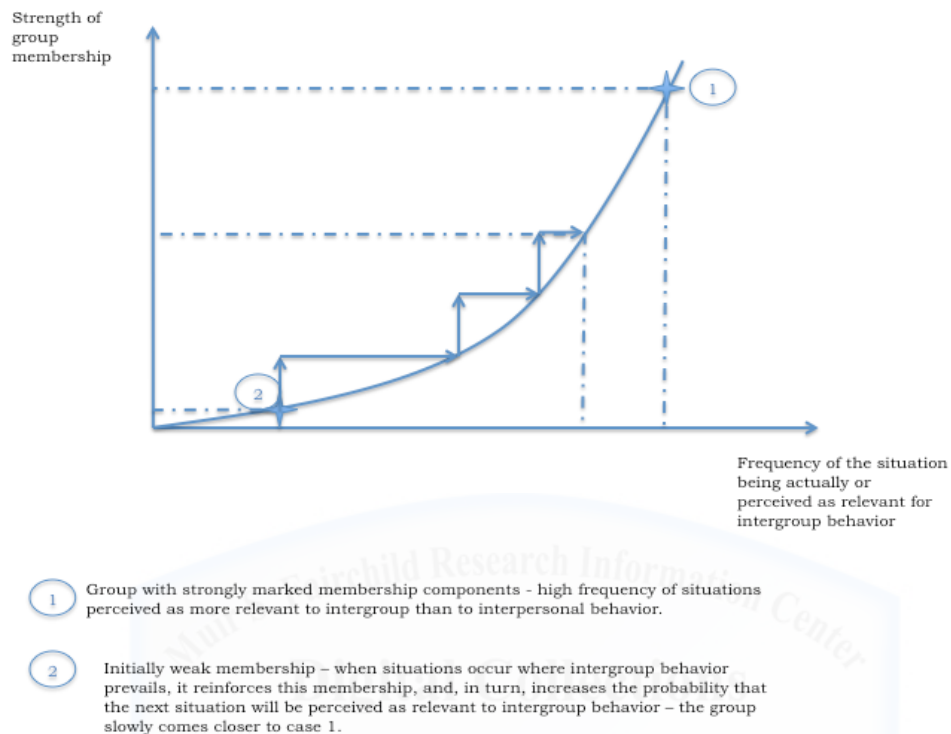
The third principle is the conjunction of the first two. Stronger identification means that group members will interpret a greater number of situations as being relevant to the collective identity rather than to the individual. Thus, there is a positive reinforcement between the strength of identification to a group, and the frequency with which affiliation to this group will dictate an individual's behavior, as illustrated by figure 1.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 243

<sup>10</sup> Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 239

**Figure 1: Positive Reinforcement between Strength of Membership and Frequency of Intergroup Behavior**



Source: Author's Work

Some groups foster more group-affiliated behavior than others do. According to optimal distinctiveness theory, groups that are more exclusive than inclusive, and set clear boundaries to their membership, are more likely to satisfy the individual's dual need for inclusion and differentiation (i.e. the need to be part of a social collective, while at the same time being distinguishable from the mass). It is also worth noting that such tight-knit groups encourage greater trust and cooperation among their members, and use norms and sanctions to monitor the behavior of their members.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Marilynn B. Brewer, "Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict," in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, Rutgers Series on Self and Social Identity, v. 3, eds. Richard D. Ashmore, Lee J.

### **Intergroup relations**

The existence of groups not only changes the behavior of group members, but it also influences intergroup relations and can inadvertently foster discrimination, competition, and even aggression.

### **Intergroup discrimination**

Intergroup discrimination consists of the “differential treatment or outcomes associated with social category membership.”<sup>12</sup> Examples include racial discrimination during apartheid in South Africa and segregation in the United States.

Marilynn Brewer identifies three different types of discrimination. The first is discrimination against members of a different group. Such discrimination reflects an unfavorable bias against the out-group, driven by “greater activation of negative evaluative processes for the out-group.” The second is the positively biased treatment of members of the in-group, while the in-group treats the out-group without any specific bias. The last type of discrimination combines the two previous: group members are biased both in favor of other group members and biased against the out-group. Brewer explains that this last form of discrimination is associated with zero-sum situations. In such cases, a group perceives any gain by an out-group as a loss for its own members.<sup>13</sup>

Discrimination can result from any kind of categorization, even arbitrary, artificial or meaningless categorizations. The “positive distinctiveness principle” leads in-groups to discriminate or compete

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Jussim, and David Wilder (Oxford [England] New York, N.Y. [USA]: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21-22

<sup>12</sup> Marilynn B. Brewer, “In-Group Favoritism: The Subtle Side of Intergroup Discrimination,” in *Codes of Conduct: Behavioral Research into Business Ethics*, eds. David M. Messick and Ann E. Tenbrunsel (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996). 161

<sup>13</sup> Brewer, “In-Group Favoritism: The Subtle Side of Intergroup Discrimination,” in *Codes of Conduct*, 161-162



against out-groups “not because there is any realistic conflict of group interests but simply to differentiate themselves and maintain a positive social identity for their members.”<sup>14</sup> Social categorization spurs over-estimation of one’s group, and exaggerated derogation toward out-groups, with heightened feelings of “moral superiority, intolerance of difference, and concomitant emotions of contempt and disgust toward relevant out-groups.”<sup>15</sup> The judgmental effect of categorization is all the more acute when groups consider the object of judgment to be of value to them.<sup>16</sup>

Intergroup discrimination has several other consequences. For example, in-group favoritism influences the perception of merit: individuals tend to be more benevolent when they evaluate the merit of members of their own group. People are also more willing to help members of their own group, more likely to see out-groupers as provoking aggression, and more likely to give the benefit of the doubt to in-groupers.<sup>17</sup>

### **From Intergroup Discrimination to Competition and Aggression**

There is no a priori reason why intergroup discrimination, or even contempt, should evolve into competition or conflict. Many sociologists question the early assumption, made by Sumner in his theorization of ethnocentrism, that there is a direct correlation between in-group love and out-group hate (i.e. that the greater the attachment within the in-group, the greater the hostility toward the out-group). However, there are factors likely to foster intergroup conflict.

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<sup>14</sup> John C. Turner, “Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group”, in Henri Tajfel, ed., *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, 1. paperback printing, European Studies in Social Psychology (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press [u.a.], 2010), 34

<sup>15</sup> Brewer, “Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict,” in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, 32

<sup>16</sup> Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 70

<sup>17</sup> Brewer, “Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict,” in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, 23



Brewer identifies some of these factors. One is the degree of self-involvement of members of a group. Another factor is the similarity of aspirations between groups. Although a given group might not be interested in the situation of the out-group per se, groups tend to measure welfare by comparison with relevant others. Studies have shown that when different groups regard a same element as most relevant to their welfare, competition among them more acute. Furthermore, if welfare depends on the distribution of limited resources, or if groups consider the situation to be a zero-sum game, “out-group achievements are threatening to in-group position and the closer the out-group, the greater the threat.” In such a case, the competition is likely to be fiercer; it may even lead to conflict<sup>18</sup>

Beyond the struggle for limited resources in a zero-sum game, other factors can push intergroup competition toward aggression. As mentioned previously, tight-knit groups encourage trust and cooperation among their members. The flip side is that such groups also lean toward caution when dealing with out-groups. The difference of treatment between in-group and out-group members creates a spiral of mistrust and suspicion, which is exacerbated when combined with accentuation (exaggeration of the differences perceived between different categories) and out-group hostility (the notion that antagonism, conflict and mutual contempt characterize inter-group relations). This confluence of factors further leads to a stereotyping of the out-group as being “clannish, exclusive, and potentially treacherous.” Brewer stresses, “What is particularly interesting about this pattern of stereotypes is that the same behaviors that are interpreted as reasonable caution on the part of the in-group in dealings with out-group members become interpreted as ‘clannishness’ and indicators of potential treachery when exhibited by

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<sup>18</sup> Brewer, “Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict,” in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, 21-26

outgroupers toward the ingroup.” Such perceptions, in turn, lead to assuming a malevolent intent from the out-groups and to “intergroup anxiety” that eventually transforms into “fear, hatred, or disgust.” Sociologists have shown that these emotional components are critical to explanations of intergroup aggression. Other elements might also play a role. For example, the existence of a common goal or threat diminishes the probability of aggression. Conversely, the probability of aggressive behavior increases when the interaction involves political entities.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, there is a specific sub-category of cases in which mistrust and suspicion take a slightly different, more irrational form, and become what Kramer and Schaffer call “out-group paranoia...an extreme form of suspicion and resultant distrust that arises between groups embedded in a familiar class of situations known as hierarchical trust dilemmas.” They argue that an asymmetry in power or status between groups is particularly conducive to the development of paranoia, defined as “individual group members’ perceptions of themselves (and their in-group) as harassed, threatened, harmed, subjugated, persecuted, accused, mistreated, wronged, tormented, disparaged, or vilified by another group or its individual members.” Kramer and Schaffer give the example of groups “disadvantaged with respect to their access to, or control over, critical resources on which their survival and well-being depend,” or newcomers in well-established organizations. The phenomenon is even more acute when a high level of interdependence ties the groups together (see Figure 2).<sup>20</sup>

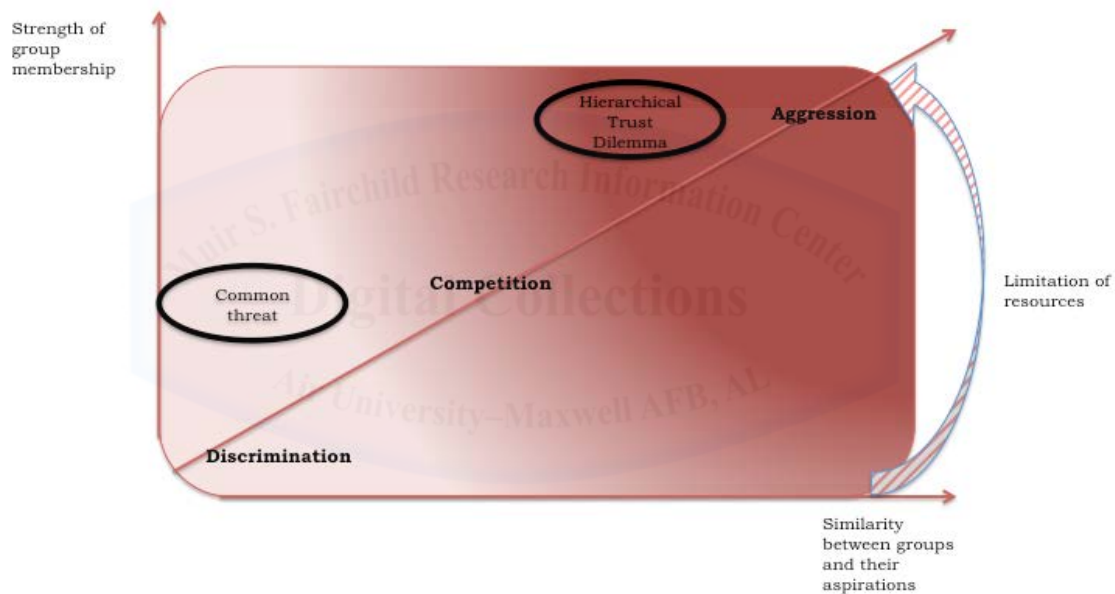
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<sup>19</sup> Brewer, “Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict,” in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, 20-35

<sup>20</sup> Roderick M Kramer and Jennifer Schaffer, “Misconnecting the dots: origins and dynamics of out-group paranoia,” in Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Paul A. M. van Lange, eds., *Power, Politics, and Paranoia: Why People Are Suspicious of Their Leaders* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 200-204

Kramer and Schaffer identify three main types of misperception as consequences of out-group paranoia: (1) the overly personalistic construal of intergroup interactions, (2) the sinister attribution error or bias, and (3) the exaggerated perception of conspiracy.<sup>21</sup> In essence, individuals from the out-group will feel personally targeted by the actions of in-group members, that in-group motives and intentions are malevolent, and that all in-group actions are coordinated to harm the out-group.

**Figure 2: From Discrimination to Aggression**



*Source: Author's Work*

### **Social mobility**

A further important aspect of intergroup dynamics is the degree of social mobility present in the relationship. Social mobility is the possibility for an individual to move from one group to another, whether

<sup>21</sup> Kramer and Schaffer, "Misconnecting the dots: origins and dynamics of out-group paranoia," in Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Paul A. M. van Lange, eds., *Power, Politics, and Paranoia*, 208

upwards, downwards, or horizontally. When boundaries between groups seem impassable, and when there is an ossification of the intergroup differentiation, then these dynamics leave individuals with little hope of social mobility. Any change in the system must happen at the group level, not at the individual one.

In particular, if one group perceives itself as inferior, and group boundaries are impermeable, the inferior group can attempt to remedy the situation in one of two ways. The first option is for the inferior group to try to become more like the superior group so that the differences between the two groups become indiscernible. The second solution is to overhaul the current value system and reinterpret the inferior group's characteristics. This latter process challenges the inferior group's lesser status and rejects the measures of inferiority as illegitimate. Hence, when there is no possibility for an individual to improve his or her situation in the current system because group boundaries are immutable, the recourse is to change the perceived value of his or her existing in-group.

To conclude, sociology offers valuable insights that aid our understanding of the interactions between groups and how these interactions shape a group's environment. Applied to the context of international relations, the same concepts can build our understanding of the relations between states, or, more importantly, groups of states.

### **Chapter 3**

## **Theory of Intergroup Relations Applied to international Relations**

This chapter will first demonstrate that security communities of states, just like groups of individuals, define norms and values that regulate their members' behavior. It will then offer a characterization of what security communities are and what they want. It will also present the factors that influence intergroup behavior, and in particular membership strength. Finally, it will show how security communities can move from simple discrimination, to competition and ultimately aggression relative to out-groups

### **Why Security Communities Matter: Shaping Norms and Behaviors**

In sociological studies, groups matter because they facilitate the creation of a system of norms and values that, in turn, influence the behavior of individuals. International security studies have long recognized that security communities have a similar effect on states' identity and behavior.

#### **Norms, Identity, and Behavior.**

In international relations as in sociology, group membership influences a state's identity. In *Security Communities and their Neighbours*, Alex Bellamy highlights this result of security alliances:

The persistence and growth of NATO, the GCC, NAFTA, ASEAN and other such institutions and relationships suggests that these relations between states cannot be understood by thinking solely in terms of costs and benefits, winning and losing, or relative and absolute gains. For the states in these and other relationships, the relationship itself has become a matter of habit. In the Pacific region, for example, a state's identity is shaped in significant ways by its membership of ANZUS or ASEAN. This identity frames

the way that the state conducts itself, the way it constructs its interests and the values and norms that it holds dear.<sup>1</sup>

Security communities often implement rules and procedures that define decision-making processes, regulate in-group relations, create expectations regarding states' behavior, and can even influence domestic institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Among the various rules and norms that apply to alliances, Snyder emphasizes obligations, reciprocity, and consultation.<sup>3</sup> Obligations cover first the various commitments and promises that are the source of the alliance. There is a strong incentive for states to fulfill these obligations in order to maintain their position in the alliance and reassure their allies. However, these obligations often expand beyond the initial expectations of the community, in what Snyder calls "the alliance 'halo,' the political penumbra that surrounds the basic military commitment."

The notion of reciprocity suggests that the commitment of one of the members is conditional upon a similar commitment by all other members. It introduces expectations and reciprocal control over members' behavior. Finally, consultation is a norm that is often implicit in the creation of alliances. Because members of a security community need to act in concert on certain issues, and must avoid taking unilateral measures that would later involve the whole community, each ally "has a right to express opposition to or attempt to modify any proposed initiative."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alex J. Bellamy, *Security Communities and Their Neighbours: Regional Fortresses or Global Integrators?* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5

<sup>2</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 68

<sup>3</sup> Glenn Herald Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 1. print. Cornell paperbacks, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007), 350-363

<sup>4</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 361

Security communities often entail a “legal and moral obligation,” and the anticipation of sanctions ensures the respect of norms and rules within an alliance.<sup>5</sup> A security community can thus create “a sense of obligation in some degree, that is, it engages moral and legal values... It also engages political values, such as prestige and reputation for honoring agreements.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Norms and emotions**

According to Simon Koschut, it is possible to find evidence that security communities are “emotional communities,” which he defines as communities having a “collective understanding of its basic emotional appraisals and their appropriate expressions.”<sup>7</sup> In security communities, members develop this collective understanding through rituals and symbols, like joint exercises or a common flag under which to rally. Security communities not only create social orders, but also help shape collective identities through “the accumulation of memories, founding myths, experiences, and symbolic patterns that enables members to make sense of the world around them within an emotionally shared reality.”<sup>8</sup>

As groups, security communities have a meaningful influence on the international system, shaping international norms as well as the behavior of individual agents, the states. The following section looks more closely at the types, characteristics, and purposes of these security communities.

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<sup>5</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (1990): 103–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24357226>.

<sup>6</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 169

<sup>7</sup> Simon Koschut, “Emotional (security) Communities: The Significance of Emotion Norms in Inter-Allied Conflict Management,” *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 03 (July 2014), 533

<sup>8</sup> Koschut, “Emotional (security) Communities”, 541



## **Security Communities in the International System**

### **Typology of Security Communities**

There are several types of security communities, or groups of states that choose to bind themselves together in order to solve security issues, and they can display a wide array of characteristics. Ikenberry distinguishes between temporary alliances, institutionally binding alliances, and supranational integration. Groups usually design the first type to counter a very specific threat. The second type is the more common, but also the more heterogeneous one: one may find loose arrangements such as the congress system established in 1815 after the Napoleonic wars, or more structured or formalized institutions such as NATO. The category of binding alliances also encompasses secret treaties like the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Ikenberry's third type, supranational integration, is exhibited in the development of the European Union.<sup>9</sup> Glenn Snyder also offers a useful typology of security communities distinguishing between alliances and entente: while the former are "explicit pledges of mutual assistance," the latter only "tacitly raise expectations of mutual support by reducing the amount of conflict between the parties."<sup>10</sup>

Alliances can also vary according to the number of members, from two, which is the most common, to many more. They can also be equal, with "reciprocal and symmetrical obligations and expectations" between states of comparable strength, or unequal when one of the members has a greater strength, a scenario that usually comes with greater expectations and obligations for the stronger state in its dealings with the weaker states. Another important distinction among security communities is variation in purpose. For example, defensive alliances,

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<sup>9</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 39-42

<sup>10</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 11-16



offensive alliances, neutrality agreements, and non-aggression treaties represent different types of security communities created for different purposes.

One can also classify alliances according to the scope and type of commitment. Foundational agreements can specify the threat, scenarios that will trigger a response by the alliance, and the consequent range of alliance actions. An alliance can target a specific opponent or the enemy can remain unidentified. The commitment can be limited to a geographical area or to a specific kind of actions by the opponent. It can also specify the type and level of support one alliance member is required to provide other alliance members.

Finally, one can classify alliances according to expected duration. Most alliances have a specified duration but some simply dissolve once the issue that led to their creation disappears. Such is the case with ad hoc coalitions like the one assembled during the first Gulf War in 1991.

### **Purposes of Security Communities**

There are several types of security communities, but they all try to fulfill three main goals. The initial purpose of any security alliance is to alleviate the danger that led to its creation. Consistent with his realist perspective, Glenn Snyder argues that any decision to enter an alliance is the result of a cost-benefit calculation. The primary benefit is increased security, while the costs derive from a loss of autonomy.<sup>11</sup> The examples of the Austro-German Alliance of 1879, the Three Emperors' Alliance of 1881, and the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1891 show that the perception of an impending threat is often the catalyst for the formation of a security alliance.

Once the alliance exists, the trade-off continues: alliance management for each state is a "security-autonomy trade-off": each state must balance its commitment to a security alliance with the desire for

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<sup>11</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 43

autonomy. An increasing threat might incite a state to give up some measure of autonomy in exchange for greater security. Conversely, a decreasing threat might encourage states to loosen their commitment to an alliance.<sup>12</sup>

A second goal of security alliances can be to restrain an ally, to make it less aggressive and more dependent, and more generally instill some measure of control over the ally's behavior.<sup>13</sup> In the case of NATO, for example, Eric Solsten highlights the "strategy of double containment" which aimed not only at countering the Soviet threat, but also at preventing Germany from "returning to the expansionist behavior that had characterized its foreign policy in the first half of the century."<sup>14</sup> The creation of norms and values within alliances offers a powerful tool to enforce restraint on an ally.

A final and critical goal of security alliances is self-perpetuation. States within an alliance often exhibit a fear of abandonment, or the "constant worry about being deserted by one's ally."<sup>15</sup> To avoid abandonment, states need to increase the perception of commitment to the alliance and to each other, "by diplomatic communications and public statements." They further need to show resolve and loyalty.<sup>16</sup> This final goal is especially important for understanding how security communities influence state behavior, as the need for alliance self-perpetuation drives a range of mechanisms aimed at strengthening member commitment.

### **What Keeps Security Communities Together**

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<sup>12</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 181

<sup>13</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 320

<sup>14</sup> Eric Solsten, *Germany: a Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996) Online Text. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/96020927>, 440

<sup>15</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 181

<sup>16</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 184

International security studies provide a number of factors that can explain the strength of states' commitment to security communities. When coupled with the necessity of self-perpetuation, these factors can also lead to polarization of intergroup relationships and discrimination between those who are part of the community, and those who are not.

### **Factors influencing security community cohesion**

**Threat.** We have seen in the previous section that the level of threat is a major element in the cost-benefit calculation that leads states to join an alliance and to remain in it. Consequently, the higher the threat, the greater the impetus for states to increase their commitment to an alliance. Indeed, Holsti, Hopmann and Sullivan argue that an increased perception of threat increases the cohesion within an alliance.<sup>17</sup>

**Level of dependence between members.** According to Snyder, "when mutual dependence is high, the alliance will be cohesive; when it is low, the alliance will be fragile."<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the level of dependence between members is also a direct consequence of the first factor, the level of threat. Indeed, "the military dependence of a state on an ally is a function of the degree of threat it faces from its adversary, the extent to which the ally can contribute to deterrence and defense against the threat, and the availability and cost of alternative means of meeting the threat... In general, the allies will be more dependent on each other's support the greater the threat from the adversary, the greater the reliance on the ally for meeting the threat, and the fewer and less desirable the alternatives."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ole R. Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John D. Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York: Wiley, 1973), 143

<sup>18</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 31

<sup>19</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 31

**Ideological Likeness of Members.** According to Holsti, Hopmann, and Sullivan, “ideologically homogeneous alliances are more likely to form pacts of a high commitment level than are heterogeneous alliances.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, common ideology provides the basis for a more cohesive alliance.

The role of ideology varies according to the maturity of the security community. In the early implementation phase, the primary goal of a community is to “emphasize pressing common interests, while ignoring or minimizing divergent interests among allies.” In particular, communities focus on leaving past dissensions in the past in order to rally together against a collective foe. In this phase, common ideology provides the basis for identifying and communicating common interests. When the alliance is more mature, it shifts from the goal of countering the danger to the goal of self-perpetuation; and the role of ideology also shifts and provides both rationale and incentive for perpetuation.<sup>21</sup>

**Other Significant Factors.** Among the other factors that contribute to making security communities more cohesive, some are particularly interesting to note. One is the clarity of purpose of the community. Holsti, Hopmann, and Sullivan argue, “Alliances with unambiguous goals tend to be of the highest commitment class.” Further, communities with multiple goals tend to last longer, because they offer more bargaining space to members in case of disagreement on one of many issues.<sup>22</sup>

Another significant factor is the degree of formality of the alliance. As previously mentioned, an alliance commitment can be tacit and informal or more formal and contractual as with the ratification of a

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<sup>20</sup> Holsti, Hopmann, and Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances*, 66

<sup>21</sup> George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 62-63

<sup>22</sup> Holsti, Hopmann, and Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances*, 77

binding treaty. A “contract” binding member states of a formal alliance increases member commitment, because institutional binding gives instills an international agreement with the strength of a legal contract.<sup>23</sup> Glenn Snyder emphasizes this phenomenon when he makes reference to the maxim “pacta sunt servanda” to explain why states tend to fulfill commitments made by treaty.

### **When Cohesion leads to Polarization and Discrimination**

The goal of self-perpetuation breeds cohesion within a security community. Most authors praise the phenomenon as a guarantee of harmony and convergence among community members. However, when studied from the perspective of in-group/out-group relationships, it appears that this phenomenon also leads to polarization between groups and discrimination of the out-group.

### **Polarization**

In order to reinforce internal cohesion, members of a security community are more likely to downplay their dissensions when an issue arises, and to emphasize their likeness. And, as Snyder argues, they will be hesitant to make accommodations toward any potential enemy due to the risk of being perceived as abandoning an ally. Therefore, “allies may be under some compulsion to support each other repeatedly lest they acquire a reputation for faithlessness.”<sup>24</sup> A consequence is that the concern for support might supersede the desire to find an effective solution to a conflict, and “the need to retain the allegiance of allies tends to inhibit the resolution of conflict between adversaries.” Intra-alliance cohesion can thus “ruin a possible accord with the opponent, provoke the opponent to form a counter alliance, or even provoke it to attack.”<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, George Liska argues that, in case of negotiations between alliances, if a possible solution would simultaneously threaten

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<sup>23</sup> John Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 65

<sup>24</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 184

<sup>25</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 196

to weaken the alliance, the impetus for cohesion hinders the efficacy of negotiations. Even worse, he explains that “not infrequently, as the positions of allies are brought closer together on substance and strategy, the position of the alliance as a whole moves away from that of the adversary. The concentration of parts entails polarization of the whole.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Discrimination**

Another effect of cohesion within an alliance is that it leads to discrimination against those who are not part of the alliance. Two factors foster this linkage. First, emphasizing the likeness of alliance members reinforces their common identity, and as we have seen, there is an emotional dimension to this identity. Emotional identity is based on common experiences and patterns and provides rationale to discriminate against outsiders, to “persuade outsiders to internalize feelings of social inferiority (shame) through emotional rigidity, stigmatization, and by placing the contact of insiders with outsiders under a taboo.”<sup>27</sup> Further, it discourages positive interaction with states outside the alliance, and sharpens “the boundaries between insiders and outsiders.”<sup>28</sup>

A second factor affecting discrimination is artificial threat inflation. Indeed, if the perception of a threat increases the benefits of being within an alliance, and if the alliance is interested in self-perpetuation, then the alliance as a whole might have an interest in inflating a perceived threat to strengthen the bonds between alliance members. George Liska identified this phenomenon in 1962 when he wrote, “The period following the peak of a threat requires that the common immediate past be glorified as creating both a moral obligation and an irrefutable political argument for perpetuating the alliance. At this point, the ideology stresses the immutability as well as the immorality of the adversary, attributing to him magical powers of resurgence and incurable addiction

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<sup>26</sup> Liska, *Nations in Alliance*, 149

<sup>27</sup> Koschut, “Emotional (security) Communities”, 541

<sup>28</sup> Koschut, “Emotional (security) Communities”, 548

to evil.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, alliance cohesion contributes to demonization of the threat or of what the alliance might perceive as a threat.

### **Lessons of sociology**

In the realm of international relations, intergroup dynamics associated with security communities should yield four broad trends to include a tendency to favor intergroup over interstate relationships, biased treatment toward out-group states, divergent interpretations of security, and hierarchical trust dilemmas that, in turn, promote paranoia, mistrust, and conflict. I discuss each of these trends in more depth below.

#### **A Tendency to favor intergroup over interstate relationships, which leads to exclusiveness and a homogenization of members' behavior toward the out-group**

One of the goals of security communities is to survive, and, in order to do so, they must constantly strengthen their membership. Sociological studies tell us that one way to do it is to increase the frequency of intergroup over interpersonal interactions. For security communities, this means that individual members have an incentive to interpret as many situations as possible as being relevant to an action by the security community as a whole.

Favoring the intergroup over the interpersonal end of the behavioral spectrum has two major implications. First, it will encourage uniformity of behavior among members, even if it means a polarization of intergroup debates, and if it runs the risk of precluding solutions to intergroup conflict. Second, in order to satisfy the optimal distinctiveness theory, the security community must emphasize the specific character of its members, and insist on what distinguishes them from the rest of the system. The immediate consequence is the creation

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<sup>29</sup> George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 63



of an “us” and a “them,” a categorization that emphasizes the difference between the out-group and the in-group.

### **Biased Treatment toward Out-Group States**

Another significant trend, which is a consequence of categorization between in-group and out-group, is the biased treatment against those who are not part of a community. In the realm of international relations, the ingroup is likely to express feelings of moral superiority, and contempt toward the out-group. Similarly, members of a security community are likely to be more lenient, tolerant, and sympathetic toward members of their community. On the contrary, they are more likely to question the intentions of the out-group, and to see them as aggressive and greedy. Stereotyping is also likely, and social theories tell us to expect in-group members to brand non-members of the security community as treacherous and malevolent.

### **Divergent Interpretations of Security between In-Group and Out-Group States**

A third phenomenon in the dynamics between security communities and out-group states relates to the perception of what security means. Sociological studies teach us that when different groups are competing over something that is of high value, they are more likely to display aggressive behavior. This tendency increases when that “something” is a resource that is only available in limited quantity. In addition, we have seen in chapter 2 that if the groups are relatively similar or close to one another, and if their relationship is of political nature is politicized, aggression is even more likely.

Interstate relations are interactions between political entities, and are therefore of political nature. Moreover, all security communities strive for the same resource of existential value to them: security. All other goals (reducing a threat, the survival of the community, or restraining an ally) are all means to the same end: ensuring the security of community members. The key question, then, is whether security is a



limited resource. If so, aggression between a security community and the out-group is almost inevitable.

There is no consensus on exactly what security means. For McSweeney, security “is an elusive term. Like peace, honor, justice, it denotes a quality of relationship which resists definition.”<sup>30</sup> Different schools of thought provide different meanings, different characteristics, and different vectors. For realists like Mearsheimer or Waltz, security depends on the maximization of power and thus security seeking is a zero-sum game.<sup>31</sup> According to liberalist theories, security can be a shared resource. Economic interdependence, international institutions, and shared democratic ideals enhance security for the community as a whole.

Ultimately, security is not an objective measure or material resource, but a perception. Hence, security means exactly what each state or community think it means. To understand the level of aggression in the relation between a security community and members of the out-group, it is necessary to understand their respective perceptions of security. If one side believes security is a limited resource while the other does not, this asymmetry in perceptions can lead to deep misunderstanding. If one group adopts the liberalist perspective and believe in shared security, the reluctance and hostility of another group with a more realist perspective may be puzzling.

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<sup>30</sup> Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity, and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 69 (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13

<sup>31</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated edition, The Norton Series in World Politics (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 2: “the overriding goal of each state is to maximize its share of world power, which means gaining power at the expense of other states.”

Kenneth Neal Waltz, ed., *Theory of International Politics*, Reissued (Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press, 2010), 64: “the means of security for one state are, in their very existence, the means by which other states are threatened.”

### **Hierarchical Trust Dilemma Favoring Hostile Behavior**

Finally, of particular relevance to international relations is the case of groups embedded in a hierarchical trust dilemma. By definition, this dilemma emerges when there is a significant asymmetry of power or status between the in-group and out-group. Such a scenario is conducive to aggressiveness and a high level of paranoia and distrust. The dilemma is even more acute when the out-group feels disadvantaged with respect to access to critical resources, and when the in-group and out-group are highly interdependent.

The first chapter of this study presented the puzzle of Russia's behavior, and the shortcomings of common explanations for this behavior. In the next chapter, we are going to look at several episodes of conflict or tension between NATO and Russia through the lens of intergroup theory. In particular, the following analysis seeks to identify evidence of bias, aggression, and paranoia consistent with intergroup theory.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Case study – Russia and NATO**

With the aim of assessing Russian behavior through the lens of intergroup theory, this chapter first justifies the focus on the relationship between Russia and NATO. Then it evaluates some factors relevant to intergroup relations: strength of group membership, limited nature of the resource over which the in-group and the out-groups are competing, and asymmetry of power or status as well as level of interdependence. The chapter then identifies indicators of bias, aggressiveness, and paranoia congruent with the expectations of intergroup theory.

#### **NATO and Russia, Inextricably Entangled in Their Quest for Security**

A focus on the relationship between NATO and Russia is of particular value for explaining Russian behavior given the centrality of security in defining this relationship. In addition, NATO exhibits most features of closely-knit groups with strong membership. Finally, asymmetry and interdependence taint the security debate between NATO and Russia.

#### **The Relevance of the NATO-Russia Relationship**

The importance of Russia for NATO is rooted in the reasons for NATO's creation. When the founding members signed the North Atlantic Treaty, in April 1949, the stated goal was "to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area."<sup>1</sup> According to NATO, there were three main goals: "detering Soviet expansionism, forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent, and encouraging European political integration."<sup>2</sup> While spreading democracy and ensuring stability were

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<sup>1</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C., 4 April 1949, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.nato.int/history/doc/7-nac/NATO\\_History.pdf](http://www.nato.int/history/doc/7-nac/NATO_History.pdf)

indeed NATO objectives, the chief purpose was to counter the threat posed by the Soviet Union, which at that time, had considerable conventional military forces and was about to get nuclear weapons.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in the early nineties, Russia became its legitimate heir, and, as such, inherited its relation with NATO. Initially, Russian leadership expressed an interest in rethinking Russia's relations with NATO, and in fostering political and military cooperation.<sup>3</sup> The rejuvenation of the relation materialized in 1997 with the signature of the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation." NATO and Russia stated that they did "not consider each other as adversaries" and shared the common goal of "overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and of strengthening mutual trust and cooperation." Above all, they recognized the indivisibility of the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic community, which included Russia.<sup>4</sup>

Although the relations between NATO and Russia have degraded almost continuously since 2008, Russia continues to tie its security to NATO's actions. Russia's National Security Strategy signed in December 2015 states, "The Russian Federation is prepared for the development of relations with NATO based on equality for the purpose of strengthening general security in the Euro-Atlantic region."<sup>5</sup>

Hence, NATO and Russia do not seem to be able to escape their entanglement when it comes to the European regional security.

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<sup>3</sup> Olivier Kempf, *L'OTAN Au XXI<sup>e</sup> Siècle: La Transformation D'un Héritage, Histoire et Société* (Perpignan: Artège, 2010), 277

<sup>4</sup> Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, Paris, France, 27 May 1997, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>

Unfortunately for Russia, it finds itself in an asymmetric relationship with a community that exhibits unusually strong cohesiveness.

### **The Strength of NATO Membership**

The initial strength of NATO was a result of the peculiar state of the international system when the allies created the alliance. Indeed, during half a century of Cold War, world leaders interpreted almost all international interactions through the prism of the struggle between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Sociological theories tell us that feelings of group membership are strengthened when intergroup behavior is frequently more relevant than interpersonal behavior. Furthermore, the conventional and nuclear threat from the Soviet Union was serious enough to ensure that no single NATO member would ever question the value and the pertinence of NATO membership. The rare exception is France's decision in the mid-1960s to leave NATO's integrated command structure due to a desire for more political independence. Even with this move, however, the French concluded a series of agreements that would ensure cooperation with the Alliance, such as the Ailleret-Lemnitzer agreements of 1967.<sup>6</sup>

When the Cold War ended, the West suddenly lost its collective enemy, and NATO consequently lost some of its appeal. NATO thus faced the possibility of loss of cohesiveness and purpose.<sup>7</sup> As a security community, however, NATO is interested in self-perpetuation and accordingly started to look for new responsibilities; and as result, the alliance expanded its geographical reach and reaffirmed its commitment to spreading democracy and stability. NATO's "New Strategic Concept," signed in 1991, emphasized the broad and comprehensive challenge of

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<sup>6</sup> Kempf, *L'OTAN Au XXIe Siècle*, 139

<sup>7</sup> Kempf, *L'OTAN Au XXIe Siècle*, 101

security and the “diverse and multi-directional risks” posed by the new strategic environment.<sup>8</sup>

Since then, NATO has benefited from a centripetal force, extending its membership from sixteen states in 1991 to twenty-eight in 2009. Meanwhile, public opinion and heads of states repeatedly expressed a continuing dedication to NATO. Except in a very few cases, favorable views of NATO are clearly predominant in most member countries, as indicated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: NATO Support in Some Member States**



*Source: Pew Research Center*

Furthermore, Koschut demonstrates the normative and emotional components of NATO membership in his study of the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya. He claims that the non-alignment of Germany with the majority of NATO members was sanctioned “through the expression of anger and by setting it apart from the rest of the group,” which “appears to have produced feelings of shame and embarrassment

<sup>8</sup> The Alliance's New Strategic Concept, 08 November 1991, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm)

on the German side accompanied by a loss of power and status within NATO.” Conversely, expression of anger and fear toward a common enemy “can be said to have generated internal relief and social cohesion through processes of emotional identification.” It has also “energized the community and provided its members with a collective sense of power.”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, NATO has put in place a sophisticated and rich system that ensures the dissemination of a common identity through common practices and frames of reference. The NATO school in Oberammergau ensures the homogeneity of operational procedures among members, and the standardization agreements (STANAGs) facilitate the interoperability between armed forces of the different countries. NATO routinely tests this interoperability through a range of exercises that ensure NATO forces are ready to operate together, with common procedures and similar equipment.

### **Interdependence and Asymmetry**

In the relation between NATO and Russia, NATO represents an in-group with high cohesiveness. Moreover, Russia suffers from a relative inferiority in power and status while at the same time is highly dependent on a number of NATO members.

From the history of NATO, it is clear that the Alliance and Russia share a common geographic area of interest. However, their interdependence goes much further. In 2015, eight of Russia’s top fifteen trading partners were NATO members. These eight countries account for more than forty percent of total Russian exports.<sup>10</sup> Europe (mostly NATO members) and Russia are also highly interdependent when it comes to energy. While Europe needs Russia as a source of supply for oil and natural gas, Russia needs Europe as a market. In 2014, Russia

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<sup>9</sup> Simon Koschut, “Emotional (security) Communities: The Significance of Emotion Norms in Inter-Allied Conflict Management,” *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 03 (July 2014), 555-557

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.worldstopexports.com/russias-top-import-partners/>



exported more than seventy percent of its crude oil and ninety percent of its natural gas to Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Asymmetry further adds to the complexity of the relationship between Russia and NATO. In terms of status, Russia emerged of the Cold War with a failed ideology, a struggling economy, and obsolete armed forces. On the other hand, NATO members could celebrate the victory of their worldview and of the Western international order. Of course, Russia is still a major international player, as evidenced by its status as a nuclear superpower and permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. However, three among the five members of the Security Council -- the United States, the United Kingdom, and France -- happen to be prominent NATO members as well as nuclear powers.

Looking at sheer military power, the Russian Federation in 2014 had 1,287,000 armed forces personnel. The United States alone had 1,381,250, with a considerably higher level of technological capabilities. Moreover, when adding the armed forces of other NATO members, the imbalance between NATO and Russia is enormous.

### **Where the Problem Lies: Conflicting Perceptions of Security**

One of the key factors promoting aggression between groups (or between an in-group and its out-group) is the relative scarcity of resources over which the groups are competing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the case of security communities, the limited character of the resource depends on each side's perception of security.

NATO's conception of security implies an enlargement of its sphere of influence. In its latest strategic concept, NATO claims that "the Alliance will engage actively to enhance international security, through partnership with relevant countries and other international organizations; by contributing actively to arms control, non-proliferation

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<sup>11</sup> US Energy Information Administration,  
<https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=RUS>



and disarmament; and by keeping the door to membership in the Alliance open to all European democracies that meet NATO's standards."<sup>12</sup> Thus for NATO, membership expansion is central to conceptions of international security. NATO has undergone several enlargements, bringing under its umbrella countries such as Albania or Croatia; and four more countries are currently aspiring to membership.

**Figure 4: NATO Enlargement**



Source: AFP

Unfortunately, the Alliance's open door policy runs counter to Russia's perception of its own security needs. Indeed, "there was and is a wide consensus within the Russian political establishment that NATO expansion contradicts basic Russian national interests."<sup>13</sup> One of

<sup>12</sup> Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Lisbon, 20 November 2010, [http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat\\_Concept\\_web\\_en.pdf](http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Alexei K. Pushkov, "Don't isolate us: A Russian view of NATO expansion", *The National Interest* 47 (Spring 1997): 58-62.

Russia's central strategic principles is to surround itself with a belt of security spaces as wide as possible.<sup>14</sup> Russia has progressively lost this "sanitary cordon" with the end of the Warsaw Pact and the emancipation of former Soviet republics, but was mostly worried when the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary left its sphere of influence to join NATO. NATO not only reneged upon the informal agreement to not expand eastward, it also absorbed what Russia considered a buffer zone between itself and Western powers.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the Russian Security Strategy has repeatedly ranked the expansion of NATO as one of the major threats against its national interests.<sup>16</sup>

Given Russia's perceptions, NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen offered the opposite perspective on strategic realities in his first speech in September 2009. Rasmussen declared that he did not "believe that the enlargement of NATO and the European Union has created any security problems for Russia. On the contrary: A more stable and prosperous Europe is indeed contributing to the security of Russia." He also insisted that NATO would pursue its open door policy, not out of a desire to encircle Russia, but in order to respect the "right of each sovereign state to freely decide its security policy and alignments."<sup>17</sup>

What Rasmussen failed to recognize is the fundamental dilemma of NATO enlargement. As Andrew Kydd puts it, "NATO enlargement poses

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<sup>14</sup> Gilles Favarel-Garrigues, Kathy Rousselet, and Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, eds., *La Russie Contemporaine*, Les Grandes études Internationales (Paris: Fayard : Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, 2010), 177

<sup>15</sup> *L'Alliance atlantique 1949 - 2009*, Politique étrangère 74.2009,4 (Paris: Colin, 2008), 837-839

<sup>16</sup> Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015, 4, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Rasmussen, Anders Fogh. NATO Secretary General. "NATO and Russia: A New Beginning." Speech. Carnegie Endowment, Brussels, 18 September 2009, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_57640.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_57640.htm)

an acute policy dilemma...NATO can be a benign security community that identifies more cooperative states and promotes cooperation among them and yet be perceived as an expanding alliance that Russia finds threatening. Although expanding the security community enlarges the zone of peace and mutual trust, it may generate fear among those still on the outside.”<sup>18</sup>

Hence, NATO and Russia are engaged in a competition over a resource, security, which is not only limited, but also part of a zero-sum game: one player’s gain is another loss. Consistent with the analysis in chapter 3, such a scenario leads to a conflictual intergroup relationship as well as acute misunderstandings in intergroup interactions, particularly with those related to security.

### **The Persistence of NATO, a Thorn in Russia’s Side**

The mere persistence of NATO after the end of the Cold War provides Russia with a motive for undermining the existing order. In the early 1990s, many thought that NATO had served its purpose and that it was time to disband the Alliance. In 1993, Andrei Kozyrev, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, wrote in the *NATO Review* about his hopes for the creation of a common space of cooperation under the auspices of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). For this to occur, the CSCE would have to “transform itself from a forum for political dialogue into an organization guaranteeing security, stability and the development of cooperation in the European space.”<sup>19</sup> Now that the threat of a military confrontation was gone, many on both sides of the previous ideological divide thought it was time to bury old

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Kydd, “Trust Building, Trust Breaking: The Dilemma of NATO Enlargement,” *International Organization* 55 (4), (MIT Press, University of Wisconsin Press, Cambridge University Press, International Organization Foundation, 2001): 801–28.

<sup>19</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, “The New Russia and the Atlantic Alliance,” *NATO Review*, No.1, February 1993: 3-6,  
<http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1993/9301-1.htm>

institutions.<sup>20</sup> Viewed through the lens of intergroup theory, and in particular the notion of social mobility, the early 1990s provided an opportunity to remove existing boundaries disappear and redraw the security landscape in Europe. For Russia, this was an opportunity to improve its situation through a redefinition of alliances, security, and values in Europe: social mobility seemed at hand.

However, many European leaders expressed hostility to the idea of terminating of NATO. According to Ivo Daalder, this was because NATO had evolved beyond its initial purpose and had become “the principal institutional expression of the transatlantic community of states and the western values that both defined and united them.”<sup>21</sup> In accordance with what intergroup theories predict, the strength on NATO membership incentivized its members to keep favoring intergroup over interpersonal behavior.

Rather than disappearing, NATO engaged in a series of enlargements, which, as many predicted, infuriated Russia and gradually decreased opportunities for cooperation.<sup>22</sup> From an intergroup dynamics perspective, Russia had to abandon hopes for social mobility: to compete with NATO, Moscow had to question NATO’s legitimacy and offer an alternative worldview. We have seen in the first chapter that some observers accuse Russia of defining itself as an anti-Europe, as seeking to shake-up the current order. From the intergroup theory perspective, it is not only rational, but also perfectly predictable.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert B. McCalla, “NATO’s Persistence after the Cold War,” *International Organization* 50, no. 3 (1996): 445–75, <http://www.jstor.org.aufric.idm.oclc.org/stable/2704032>, 446

<sup>21</sup> Ivo H. Daalder, “NATO in the 21st Century: What Purpose? What Missions?”, Brookings, April 1999, 6-7, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/1999/4/nato-daalder/reportch1.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 12

In sum, the situation between NATO and Russia is that of a zero-sum game between two politicized entities with tight interdependence and an asymmetry of status and power. This condition creates a hierarchical trust dilemma without any perspective of social mobility for the “inferior” party. Given such a scenario, the sociological approach predicts biased treatment in favor of the in-group, and/or against the out-group, exaggerated expressions of contempt and distrust from the in-group toward the out-group, and paranoia from the disadvantaged party. The purpose of the next section is to identify examples of these types of behaviors.

### **Evidence of Intergroup-Driven Behavior**

#### **Georgia, 2008: Bias Against the Out-group**

In early August 2008, news that Russian tanks were rolling over the small republic of Georgia shook the world and reminded Europe of its darkest hours under the Soviet threat. Quickly, NATO offered support to its ally Georgia, which has been a member of the Partnership for Peace since 1994, and in 2008 was aspiring to NATO membership. According to a NATO press release, “NATO Ambassadors deplored Russia's disproportionate use of force.” They “reconfirmed and reiterated their full support for the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the Republic of Georgia,” and rejected the decision of the Russian Government to extend recognition to the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia.<sup>23</sup> Jacques Sapir, director of studies at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, highlights that most Western leaders made a one-

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<sup>23</sup> NATO Press Release, North Atlantic Council discusses situation in Georgia, 12 August 2008, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_43416.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_43416.htm?selectedLocale=en)  
Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop, 19 August 2008, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_7903.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_7903.htm?selectedLocale=en)

sided analysis of the conflict: they chose to highlight Moscow's responsibility only in the outbreak of the conflict.<sup>24</sup>

However, a careful appraisal of the situation reveals that there was shared responsibility for the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. James Nixey argues, for instance, that "there is culpability on both sides," since "Georgia's large-scale use of force and taking of human life on 7-8 August" against the secessionist province of South Ossetia "was disastrous and disproportionate," even though not unprovoked.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the eventuality of a shared culpability, NATO almost immediately chose to stand by Georgia against Russia. From a sociological perspective, such behavior is congruent with a tendency to perceive the out-group as more aggressive, and to refuse to give it the benefit of the doubt.

NATO's reaction is even more interesting when viewed in parallel with the situation in Kosovo, unfolding almost at the same time. On 17 February, Kosovo declared its independence and received extensive support from Western countries, including a nearly immediate recognition by key states such as the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany. Russia opposed this move on grounds that it broke the rules regarding state recognition that the international community set when the Soviet Union collapsed.

In August, Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, using the exact same argument Western leaders used for Kosovo.<sup>26</sup> James Nixey stresses that the majority of South Ossetians did

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<sup>24</sup> Jacques Sapir, *La Guerre d'Ossétie du Sud et ses conséquences: Réflexions sur une crise du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 29 September 2008, 43

<sup>25</sup> James Nixey, "Intellectual Dishonesty and the Culpability of All," Chatham House, 13 August 2008, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/media/comment/view/163277>

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny and Vicken Cheterian, "Making States and Breaking States: Kosovo and the Caucasus in 2008: Introduction.," *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 5 (September 2012), 658



not wish to be part of Georgia. However, with the subsequent case of Georgia, NATO chose to support the territorial integrity of the state. While there are several differences between Kosovo and Ossetia or South Abkhazia, the speed with which Western leaders made up their minds suggests strongly the existence of a double standard reflecting bias toward the out-group.

### **Contempt and Distrust**

Another characteristic of the relation between NATO and Russia is the recurrent contempt expressed toward Moscow. In an article for *Foreign Affairs*, Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman criticize Western attitude toward Russia's concerns. They argue that Western leaders often blame Russian "childishness," "paranoia," or "emotional instability," and fail to investigate thoroughly the motivation of Russian leaders.<sup>27</sup>

Examples of this attitude are numerous. German Chancellor Angela Merkel once claimed that Putin had lost touch with reality.<sup>28</sup> Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, wrote an article entitled "NATO should stop feeding the Russian troll," denouncing the abusive behavior of Russia in dealing with the Alliance. He accuses Russia of having abused NATO's trust and bullied its neighbors, and calls for a tougher stance.<sup>29</sup> Not only is the title of the article disparaging, but also dangerously aggressive and biased. Indeed,

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<sup>27</sup> Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, "Why Moscow Says No: A Question of Russian Interests, Not Psychology," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2011-01-01/why-moscow-says-no>

<sup>28</sup> Peter Baker, "Pressure Rising as Obama Works to Rein In Russia," *The New York Times*, 2 March 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/03/world/europe/pressure-rising-as-obama-works-to-rein-in-russia.html>

<sup>29</sup> Linas Linkevičius, "NATO should stop feeding the Russian troll," *Politico*, 5 March 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/nato-stop-feeding-russia-troll-defense-alliance-syria-war-baltics/>

Russian officials could also accuse NATO of having abused Russia's trust when NATO chose to enlarge "despite assurances to the contrary at the highest level and in violation of solemn declarations on the establishment of a system of equal and indivisible security in the Euro-Atlantic space."<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the Polish foreign minister claimed that Russia is more dangerous than the Salafi jihadist group ISIS. While he describes terrorism as a non-existential threat, he asserts that Russia is an "existential threat because this activity can destroy countries."<sup>31</sup>

The official NATO website offers a last and even more institutional proof of systematic contempt toward Russia. A page entitled "NATO-Russia relations: the facts" purports to answer to Russian officials, who have "accused NATO of a series of mythical provocations, threats and hostile actions stretching back over 25 years." Against those myths, then, NATO ostensibly offered factual truths. However, a careful reading of the page reveals that NATO answers Russia's "mythical" claims with opinion and propaganda rather than by laying out facts.<sup>32</sup> For instance, when Russia claims that NATO will set up a military base in Georgia, the Alliance's website responds that the site will not be a base, but a "training center," and that it "will contribute to stability by making Georgia's armed forces more professional, and by reinforcing the democratic controls over them." If taking a more honest and objective approach, NATO leaders would acknowledge that a training center is,

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<sup>30</sup> Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/russian-foreign-policy>

<sup>31</sup> "Poland Foreign Minister: Russia Is More Dangerous Than ISIS," *Defense News*, 16 April 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2016/04/16/russia-more-dangerous-than-says-poland-foreign-minister/83120564/>

<sup>32</sup> NATO-Russia relations: the facts, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_111767.htm#cl407](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm#cl407)



indeed, a base, and that NATO will station troops on the base, if only for training purposes.

In the Wales Summit agreement of 2014, NATO “endorsed a substantial package for Georgia that includes defense capacity building, training, exercises, strengthened liaison, and enhanced interoperability opportunities.” From the Russian perspective, what is even more worrisome is NATO members’ claim that “these measures aim to strengthen Georgia's defense and interoperability capabilities with the Alliance, which will help Georgia advance in its preparations towards membership in the Alliance.”<sup>33</sup> Given the Russian conception of security, they cannot help but see this move as anything but threatening, despite NATO’s insistence on the contrary. To add irony to contempt, NATO has chosen to open its training center in Georgia on Vaziani air base, which was a Russian base until 2001. Although NATO can keep claiming that the site will not be a NATO base in the sense that NATO will not station troops there permanently, there is nothing “mythical” in Russian claims. At most, these claims are a little bit exaggerated.

However, it would be an unfair to put the blame for bad relations on NATO only. While NATO tends to show little respect and consideration for Russian concerns, Russia sometimes exhibits paranoid trends, congruent with the hierarchical trust dilemma.

### **Paranoia as a Response to Contempt**

In chapter 2, we characterized paranoia as encompassing three main phenomena: the overly personalistic construal of intergroup interactions, the sinister attribution error or bias, and the exaggerated perception of conspiracy. Overall, in-group members make individuals from the out-group feel “personally targeted by the actions of group

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<sup>33</sup> Wales Summit Declaration, 05 September 2014, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)

members, that their motives and intentions are malevolent, and that all their actions are coordinated to harm them.”

In recent years, Russia has demonstrated paranoia in several instances, and most notably in response to the series of regime changes in former Soviet republics, later called the “color revolutions.” According to Moscow, Western leaders engineered the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, in an effort to “initiate regime change in the post-soviet states, an ambitious undertaking that potentially extended to Russia itself.”<sup>34</sup> However, numerous experts of the post-Soviet space agree that the color revolutions were above all the results of internal political processes of and a consequence of Moscow’s disastrous policies in the region. In Ukraine, for example, the public resented Russia’s direct involvement and interference during the national electoral campaign.<sup>35</sup>

The tensions over the deployment of a NATO missile defense system offer further example of Russian paranoid tendency toward NATO. Despite several attempts by NATO officials to reassure Russia, and several modifications made to the project, Russia keeps claiming that the project aims at “neutralizing Russia’s nuclear potential.”<sup>36</sup> Russian leadership sees the NATO missile defense development, as an attempt to undermine Russia’s nuclear deterrent, and Moscow is

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<sup>34</sup> Jeanne L. Wilson, “The Legacy of the Color Revolutions for Russian Politics and Foreign Policy,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 2 (April 3, 2010), 21

<sup>35</sup> Favarel-Garrigues, Rousselet, and Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, eds., *La Russie Contemporaine*, 202-203

<sup>36</sup> “Putin: US missile defense aimed at neutralizing Russia nukes, N. Korea & Iran just a cover,” RT, 10 November 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/321434-us-missile-shield-putin/>

reluctant to accept NATO good-will gestures associated with the development.<sup>37</sup>

Overall, the relationship between Russia and NATO exhibits patterns consistent with the expectations of intergroup theory. This one case is not enough to establish a predictive model of international relations or completely discount traditional explanations offered by realist or liberal schools of thought. But the case does show how intergroup theory adds some new and interesting perspectives on what motivates and drives state behavior in the international system.



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<sup>37</sup> Richard Weitz, "Défense Anti-Missile: l'improbable coopération entre la Russie et l'OTAN." *Russie.Nei.Visions* n°67, IFRI. January 2013, 16

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion: The Value of Alternative Perspectives**

The relationship between Russia and NATO exhibits some of the characteristics of in-group/out-group dynamics. In particular, one can observe demonstrations of mistrust, bias, and paranoia, all of which are typical of the type of relationship in which NATO and Russia have embedded themselves. NATO and Russia have caught themselves in a hierarchical trust dilemma, where they compete over a resource that at least one side sees as limited. Sociological theories can help explain some of the features of this relationship. Taking the analysis further could lead to valuable conclusions about international relations.

#### **The Dark Side of Security Communities**

Theorists of international relations often see security communities as a way to alleviate the security dilemma. Liberalists think that creating communities and fostering interdependence yield peaceful interstate relations. The sociological approach teaches us that, although security communities might create spaces of shared values and understanding, these communities can produce negative consequences, particularly for those elements that fall within the out-group. The sociological approach, beyond providing explanatory value, can thus also push members of security communities to reflect on their own biases, on how the emphasis on solidarity and cohesion might lead to categorization and polarization. The sociological approach also provides incentive to understand how groups that see themselves as peaceful can actually appear threatening and unjust from an outsider's perspective.

In the case of NATO and Russia, the asymmetric relationship, a high degree of interdependence, and irreconcilable meanings of security offer an explanation for Moscow's apparent aggressiveness, and for the difficulties endemic to dialogue between the two parties. A strictly realist explanation may be able to account for much of Russia's behavior, but

the sociological approach illuminates why increasing interdependence might not alleviate the tension. On the contrary, interdependence could lead Russia to feel the hierarchical trust dilemma even more acutely, and ultimately increase Russia's paranoia and reluctance to trust and cooperate with NATO.

### **Additional Implications: A Sociological Approach to Conflict Resolution**

In "Sociology and International Relations: Legacies and Prospects," George Lawson and Robbie Shilliam recommend an interdisciplinary approach to the study of international relations and point to the "possibilities in terms of reducing IR's intellectual autism and opening the discipline towards potentially fertile terrain that was never, actually, that distant."<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has shown how the sociological approach can aid in explaining international conflict and belligerent state behavior. In addition, analysts might also apply the sociological approach in seeking out ways to resolve international tensions. There has been extensive sociological research in the field of intergroup conflicts. In his work on the resolution of intergroup conflict, for example, Ronald Fisher offers a list of conditions that might facilitate positive interactions between groups. Creating contact situations with a high "acquaintance potential" in an informal setting is one of them. Ensuring equal status between in-group and out-group members during interactions and creating a rewarding structure that encourages participants to work together toward common goals are also critical factors for successful intergroup

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<sup>1</sup> George Lawson and Robbie Shilliam, "Sociology and International Relations: Legacies and Prospects," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23, no. 1 (March 2010), 82

interactions.<sup>2</sup> If some of the concepts and findings related to the study of intergroup conflict resolution can be exported to the field of international relations, we may be able to identify new and better ways to deal with interstate conflict.

### **Limitations and Opportunities for Further Study**

The present study can only be a first and superficial attempt at applying sociological intergroup theories to interstate relations. Indeed, its narrow focus on security communities does not capture the complexity of the current international environment. Economic interdependence today plays a major role in tying states together, and a deeper study of intergroup relations should study the interplay and effects of several layers and types of intergroup relations. In the case of NATO and Russia, for instance, it might be interesting to focus on the OSCE, and to assess whether the OSCE could offer a suitable arena for alleviating some of the endemic in-group/out-group tensions.

Additionally, the author based this study on the Rational Actor Model, which assumes that states are unitary actors. Allison and Zelikow, among others, have demonstrated the limitations of this model. More complex models, such as the Organizational Behavior Model and the Governmental Politics Model, can offer some valuable insight into decisions at the state level by looking at factors and elements internal to the state.<sup>3</sup> Along these lines, domestic or transnational intergroup interactions can also influence international intergroup relations. Moving beyond the more limited “groups of states” focus of the present study, this multi-layered “nesting dolls” characteristic of intergroup dynamics within the international system may provide even better

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald J. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution*, Springer Series in Social Psychology (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), 181

<sup>3</sup> Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed (New York: Longman, 1999), 387-389

explanation for a number of puzzling state behaviors. How the intergroup relationships among groups of non-state actors affect international politics thus deserves further study.



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